

BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

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William Canynges (1402–1474): Mayor of Bristol and Dean of Westbury is the fifty-ninth pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. The author, James Sherborne, is a Senior Lecturer in History in the University of Bristol and has contributed two other pamphlets to this series: The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages and University College, Bristol, 1876–1909. He wishes to acknowledge the generous help he has received from Miss Anne Crawford and the Bristol Record Office, Dr R.D. Dunning, Miss Elizabeth Ralph and Dr Basil Cottle.

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Mr Reece Winstone and Mr A.J. Knee took some of the photographs and Mr Gordon Kelsey and the Arts Faculty Photographic Unit kindly helped with the illustrations. The picture on the front cover was provided by Mr Reece Winstone from a photograph taken in 1843.

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The next pamphlet in the series will be *The Bristol Slave Traders: A Collective Portrait* by David Richardson of Hull University. It will be published on 29 April 1985 on which day Mr Richardson will deliver a public lecture in the Reception Room of the Wills Memorial Building to celebrate twenty-five years of publication by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association.

A list of pamphlets still in print is given on the inside back cover. Pamphlets may be obtained from most Bristol bookshops, from the Porters' Lodge in the Wills Memorial Building, from the shop in the Museum and direct from Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol 9.

WILLIAM CANYNGES (1402–1474) MAYOR OF BRISTOL AND DEAN OF WESTBURY COLLEGE

In 1854 George Pryce expressed dismay about the one thousand and one stories which had gained credence about William Canynges, and a century later Edith Williams, writing in similar vein, regretted that 'fiction and legend and wishful thinking, coloured by vivid imagination had been used too freely' by historians of Canynges.' But when the fabrications of Thomas Chatterton have been stripped away, and these are not hard to identify, we would in fact be grateful to know much more about Canynges than the scattered fragments of evidence which survive from his long life allow.² A good contemporary authority described Canynges as very rich and very wise. These were not merely the conventional words of an admirer, but rather the considered judgement of a man accustomed to the ways and means of fifteenth-century Englishmen in town and country. All that we can discover about William Canynges today endorses the judgement of William Worcester which was written over five hundred years ago.3

Merchants by the name of Canynges flourished in Bristol over four generations. We know little about John Canynges I, the first merchant of that name found in Bristol. A shadowy figure, he is found trading in wool in 1341. Some years earlier, in 1334, he witnessed the deed of sale of a shop in Redcliffe Street. We do not

G. Pryce, Memorials of the Canynges' Family (Bristol, 1854), 93; E.E. Williams, Chantries of William Canynges in St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol (Bristol, 1950), 44.

^{2.} For Chatterton and Canynges see E.H.W. Meyerstein, *Life of Thomas Chatterton* (London, 1930), *passim*.

^{3.} J. Dallaway, Antiquities of Bristow (Bristol, 1834), 17.

^{4.} Williams, op. cit., 45; Cal. Pat. Rolls 1341-3, 15.

know when he was born or when he died. It is tempting to speculate that he or a forebear had come to Bristol from the bishop of Salisbury's manor of Cannings near Devizes or, more specifically, perhaps from the village of Bishops Cannings or that of All Cannings.⁵ Were we to modernise the spelling of the surname we would spell it like today's villages, but in fact there is no regular spelling: late medieval variants were legion and there is no received opinion today. In the church of St Mary Redcliffe today, however, our subject is recalled as William *Canynges*, and that is how we shall spell his name.

We do not know if John Canynges I was the father of William Canynges I, who was of mature years by 1362 and who died in 1396, but it is tempting to think that there may have been a relationship. This may be suggested by the fact that William Canynges I lived in the parish of St Thomas the Martyr and it was in this same parish that John Canynges I witnessed the deed of 1334. It was regular for members of a family to live generation after generation in the same parish.

William Canynges I was and is a far more substantial figure than John Canynges I, comparable in power and influence to his better known namesake, William Canynges II. We first meet him as joint bailiff of Bristol in 1362;6 this office was regularly held by rising merchants near the start of their careers. William Canynges I, unlike John Canynges II or William Canynges II, was never sheriff of Bristol, for there was no such office until 1373 when Edward III's famous charter created the County of Bristol, fusing into a new entity the area north of the river Avon which lay in Gloucestershire and included fifteen parishes in the diocese of Worcester with that south of the river which lay in Somerset and included the chapelries of St Thomas and St Mary Redcliffe and the parish of Holy Cross or Temple, which belonged to the diocese of Bath and Wells. Canynges became first mayor under this new dispensaation on 29 September 1373. Four mayoralties followed later and on three occasions Canynges travelled to Westminster to represent Bristol in parliament. The second Canvinges, therefore, became one of the great men of Bristol of his generation.

His lifetime spanned two momentous phenomena in national

^{5.} Bishops Cannings lay in the hundred of Cannings.

^{6.} Dates of tenures of office derive from R. Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith (Camden Society, 1872).

and in local history, which had profound effects on Bristol life and helped to shape the environment of the younger William Canynges. The first was a huge decline in population caused by the arrival of the Black Death. This reached Bristol on 15 August 1348.7 Thereafter this devastating infection and other epidemics never spared the population for long. Inevitably material and human scars were left on the face of Bristol and there were fewer bodies to feed, clothe and house. In 1377 the poll tax returns indicate a Bristol population of 6345 persons of fourteen or over. What it had been a generation earlier can only be conjectured, and what it was one hundred or one hundred and fifty years later is uncertain. An estimate, fluctuating around the 10,000 level between 1377 and c.1550, might not be very wide of the mark.8 Many of these were engaged in Bristol's cloth industry, and the development of this after c.1350 was the second great event nationally and locally of William Canynges I's career. Bristol clothiers had been making good cloth since at least the twelfth century. After c. 1350, however, a great change took place. What happened was that a hitherto unquantifiable, but apparently small, export of cloth from Bristol, much of it produced locally, grew dramatically, stimulating the fortunes of Bristol merchants and shipowners and providing work in the town which in significant measure offset the economic consequences of the plague. In 1348–9, for example, the first year for which a figure for export of cloth by denizen merchants from Bristol survives, only 900 cloths were shipped. By the decade 1360-1 to 1369-70, however, Bristol's average annual export had soared to 4529 cloths and in the 1390s an average of 5566 cloths were exported from the town each year. 10 This was the world in which William Canynges I prospered. Cloth was the basic fare of his business life and he was both a producer and an exporter of this precious material. Life was much the same for

^{7.} C.E. Boucher, 'The Black Death in Bristol', *Trans.Bristol & Gloucs.Archaeol. Soc.* (hereafter *TBGAS*), xxvi (1903), 108–133.

^{8.} J.W. Sherborne, *Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages* (Bristol Hist.Assoc., 1965), 29.

^{9.} For some clothworkers in Bristol before 1348 see E.A. Fuller, 'The Tallage of 6 Edward II and the Bristol rebellion', *TBGAS*, xix (1895), 175–183.

Figures for Bristol's cloth exports are derived from E.M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, England's Export Trade 1275–1547 (Oxford, 1963) and wine imports from M.K. James, Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade (Oxford, 1971), 107–116.

William Canynges II for much of his career, except that he was not a clothier. Here royal records, primarily in the form of customs accounts, are crucial to our story but these, it must be emphasised, tell us little about the non-maritime economic activities of the Canynges, and while we are grateful for those 'particulars' of the customs accounts which have survived, they are in fact few for the careers of either William Canynges I or William Canynges II. Indeed over a whole century less than one hundred overseas transactions by members of the Canynges family are known and we are restricted in our knowledge to only a few strands in the fabric of their economic lives.

The will of William Canynges I was proved on 8 May 1396. As was characteristic of the period there were bequests to the clergy of his parish, to the four orders of Friars in the town and to three hospitals." Here we have evidence of a piety common to men of his wealth and background, a piety which expressed itself in varied ways. An indication of surplus wealth and religious enthusiasm can be seen in the rebuilding of the town's churches. There is a late tradition, probably of the seventeenth century, which links the elder William Canynges with the rebuilding of St Mary Redcliffe. Ambitious and transforming work had begun in this church well before 1350 and throughout Canynges's life St Mary's was assuming new and splendid dimensions. Long after the Reformation, such was the strength of the association of the name of Canynges with Redcliffe church, it was believed that in 1376 'William Canynges builded the bodye of Redcliffe church, from the cross Iles downewards. And so ye church was ffynished as it is nowe'. 12 There are problems in this tradition. The main one is that while historians of architecture agree in ascribing the nave of the church to the later fourteenth century, we must be hesitant about allowing Canynges the importance given to him here. We know he had property in Redcliffe parish but, as his will makes clear, his primary parochial loyalty was to St Thomas's. It is likely that he was a contributor to the work on Redcliffe church, but it may be unwise to attribute to him prime responsibility for the nave.

By his wife Agnes William Canynges I had two sons, Simon,

Bristol Archives Office (B.A.O.) Great Orphan Book s.n. William Canynges and John Canynges. I am grateful for access to records in this source and to Miss Anne Crawford for help with them.

^{12.} Ricart, op. cit., 36.

who was the elder, and John, who was the father of the subject of this essay. John Canynges was of similar stamp as the elder William. Like him he was a clothier and a foreign merchant, importing from Gascony, Portugal and Flanders (an infrequent market) and like William exporting cloth to Portugal, La Rochelle and Ireland in 1390-1. Gascony, which was not one of his cloth markets that year, usually was. John sat with William on Common Council and was sheriff in 1382, the year following William's third mayoralty. He was mayor in 1389 and 1392 and was returned to parliament once. A substantial property owner, he too lived in St Thomas's parish where he was buried. He had married Joan Wotton by 2 September 1387. When he drew up his will in March 1405, his wife was pregnant and there were six children under age, three boys and three girls. One son, John, had died by January 1408. Some twenty years later Margaret and Agnes had also died and Joan, the third daughter, had married John Sutton, who may have been a man of substance. It was regular practice at this time to assign in wills a third of the goods and chattels to the widow, a third to the children, and a third for the testator's soul. This is what John Canynges did, also leaving his wife a life interest in his properties with remainder to his three sons and the unborn child.¹³

By 1408 John Canynges's widow, Joan, had remarried. Thomas Young, her new husband, had come to Bristol from Wales, had prospered and was rising in the town hierarchy. Bailiff in 1402, he was sheriff in 1407, possibly near the time of his marriage, and later mayor in 1411 and 1420. On 2 January 1408 before the mayor sitting in full hundred in the Guildhall, Young assumed custody of his step-children, Thomas $(10\frac{1}{2})$, Margaret (7), William $(5\frac{1}{2})$ and Agnes (3), undertaking to maintain them decently and to provide proper instruction. We should like to know how the children received what was evidently an excellent education. Young acknowledged receipt of £72 13s 6d for each child, being their portion of a share of their father's goods and chattels, the money being payable to them when they came of age. 14

Thomas Young and his bride set up home in the parish of St Thomas, and to the voices of his step-children were soon added those of his own sons, John and Thomas. This able and apparently

^{13.} Overseas Trade of Bristol (Overseas hereafter), ed. E.M. Carus-Wilson, Bristol Rec. Soc., vii (1937), 180-9, 190-203.

^{14.} B.A.O., Book of Recognisances.



A newly elected Mayor of Bristol takes his oath in the Guild Hall From Ricart's *Kalendar* of 1479 By permission of Bristol Corporation

sympathetic man presided over a household full of energy and ability and the boys, as they grew up, met the great men of Bristol when they called to discuss town business, the state of trade and industry and the news from London. Three of them were inspired by what they heard to seek their fortunes there, Thomas Canynges and the Young boys. Thomas Canynges and John Young went to pursue careers as merchants, and Thomas Young II, breaking new ground, went to the Middle Temple to train as a lawyer. They all prospered. Thomas Canvinges became a grocer and alderman of Aldgate Ward (1445). He was Lord Mayor of London in 1456–7 when his younger brother was mayor of Bristol. He sat as an M.P. once. So too did John Young, another grocer, who was also an alderman and Lord Mayor of London in 1466-7, the year of William Canynges's last mayoralty of Bristol. Thomas Young soon established himself in the law. As we shall see, he retained close links with Bristol throughout his life, first appearing as Recorder of the town on 8 October 1441 and witnessing a deed in company with his half-brother who was then a few weeks into his first mayoralty.15

Thomas Young the elder died in 1427 and on 3 June of that year William Canynges acknowledged that he had received from his stepfather's executors (Joan, his mother, and John, his halfbrother) his inheritance of £72 13s 6d and those portions of his father's estate which had come to him through the deaths of John, Margaret and Agnes Canynges. Here was useful capital for a young merchant, now aged perhaps twenty-five. 16 By 27 September 1429 Canynges had married Joan Burton, the daughter of an old friend of his stepfather. It seems the families had been close, for Joan's sister, Isabel, married Thomas Young the younger. John Burton was another parishioner of St Thomas's and a foreign merchant. With a long career ahead of him, he was by 1429 (when he was mayor) a very considerable man and anxious to help his sons-in-law. Family tradition and inheritance had set the younger William Canynges on the road; the guidance of his stepfather and the encouragement of his father-in-law promoted him. But he was

^{15.} A.B. Beavan, *Aldermen of the city of London*, 2 vols (London, 1908–13), i 10 et seq, ii 12, 210; J.T. Driver, 'Parliamentary Burgesses for Bristol and Gloucester 1422–1437', *TBGAS* lxxiv (1955), 113–121.

^{16.} B.A.O., Book of Recognisances.

^{17.} Driver, loc. cit., 74-9, 114; Williams, op. cit., 53.

his own man, and time was to reveal qualities of hard work, integrity and leadership.

Canynges star was rising by 1429 and he may already have joined Burton as a common councillor by that year, for in 1432 he was bailiff of Bristol and in 1436 constable of the staple.18 Canynges's name, it should be noted, never appears in the aulnage returns and thus he was not, as the older William and his father had been, a clothier.19 All the scanty evidence of his business interests reveal him only as a foreign merchant, a property owner and a shipowner. His first documented venture overseas comes on 8 August 1436 when he was past thirty; he was licensed to send his own ship, The Holy Spirit of Bristol, laden with cloth and other goods overseas. Here is also the first reference to Canynges as a shipowner. Later trading enterprises included a licence to trade with Prussia and Dantzig dated 20 March 1448 and one of 1453 to trade to Castile for two years with The Mary of St Sebastian. Freighting foreign ships was not unusual in the fifteenth century, but for the most part Bristol merchants used vessels from their home port. The bulk of Canynges's overseas ventures, we may assume, were directed towards the South-West, to Gascony, Portugal and Castile with English cloth the invariable export and wine, woad, iron, oil, sugar, wax, soap, fruit and salt the customary imports. Canynges's last known export of cloth was in April 1461 when he despatched fifteen cloths without grain and twenty Welsh cloths to Castile; this was a modest but not untypical venture. Canynges never attempted, like Robert Sturmy, trade in the Mediterranean, but for all of twenty-five years he did business on the 'costes cold' of Iceland and with the extreme north of Norway, Finmark. The quest there was for fish and in particular stockfish, unsalted cod which was split and left to dry in the chilling cold. Exports to Iceland included much-needed food and drink, a variety of consumer goods, including pins and needles, and, of course, cloth.20

What were the fortunes of Bristol's foreign trade during Canynges's lifetime? The upward thrust of cloth exported between

^{18.} Little Red Book of Bristol, ed. F.B. Bickley, 2 vols (Bristol, 1900), i 178.

E.M. Carus-Wilson, Medieval Merchant Venturers (M.M.V. hereafter) (London, 1954), 85.

Overseas 68, 94, 103, 209, ibid 66f for Iceland Trade, E.M. Carus-Wilson, Merchant Adventurers of Bristol in Fifteenth Century, (1962), 8–14.

1350 and 1400, jagged on the graph though it is and failing to sustain the momentum of the 1360s, culminated in a high point in the 1390s with an annual average export, as we have seen, of 5566 cloths. The younger William never saw trade on this scale. Sadly we cannot compare wine imports and shipments of goods subject to poundage before and after 1400, because duties on these goods were levied only irregularly before 1400. Until the last quarter of the fifteenth century trade in cloth was disappointing for the most part compared to the 1360s and 1390s. During the 1420s, when we may assume William began trading, the decennial average of cloth exports was respectable at 4384 cloths, but wine was weak at an average of 756 tons imported a year. In the next decade cloth exports had a rather lower average (4100) but wine improved to 1138 tons. By far the best years of Canynges's career came from 1440-1 to 1449-50, when cloths exported averaged 5032 and over 2000 tons of wine were brought to Bristol.²¹ In so far as volume of trade is an index of its profitability, it was at this time that William Canynges had most opportunity to better himself and build up his capital. At the best of times the flow of traffic year by year in and out of Bristol was erratic, but with skill, patience, a gift for anticipating the markets and some measure of indispensable good fortune, there was money to be made. This Canynges evidently did, and in his later years used it to interesting effect as a shipowner. The accumulation of his fleet probably came late. What is remarkable is the choice that he made at a time when trade was often in severe retreat; between 1450 and 1475 the overall condition of foreign trade was often gloomy and among several setbacks the loss of Bordeaux in 1453 was wounding. Yet Canynges made a bold investment, one which was unparallelled in Bristol or elsewhere in England at this time. The records are slight but Canynges, it seems, withdrew from personal shipments in foreign trade and committed his capital to carrying the goods of others.

As we have seen, he owned *The Holy Spirit* in 1436. Commonly, however, merchants preferred part-ownership of vessels, thus reducing the scale of possible loss through the hazards of the sea, particularly in war-time. It is from the unconfirmed *Itinerary* of William Worcester that we learn of the nine ships built by



Tomb of William Canynges in mayoral robes and of his wife Joan, south transept of St. Mary Redcliffe church Photograph by A.J. Knee

Canynges and of a tenth lost off Iceland. Worcester liked to get his facts right and he knew Bristol well, making notes of his explorations of the town in and before 1480. He was an inveterate traveller who had friends and at least one relation there. Almost certainly he knew William Canynges. The *Itinerary* is a major source for late medieval Bristol, the work of a topographer with antiquarian interests who paced the streets and measured or sought information about buildings which interested him. He was a great questioner.

It seems unlikely, such was the scale of investment, that Canynges built his ships all at one time. If, however, we exclude The Margaret of (?) Tenby and The Catherine of Boston, built probably at those ports, the others may have been built at Bristol where shipbuilding and repairs were concentrated near Marsh Gate and close to the river Frome beyond the western end of The Ouay. Worcester took trouble over tonnage: all he could say about the ship lost off Iceland was that it was about 160 tons. There were formulae for measuring tonnage at this time but the figures given for particular ships were often only an approximation. The spread in the size of Canynges's ships given by Worcester ranges from 900 tons for The Mary and John down to the 50 tons of The Galiot. Seven of the ships named were of 220 tons or below and to hold a perspective of English shipping at this time it is worth stressing that a ship of 200 tons was relatively large. Those of 400 tons and over - and Canynges owned The Mary Canynges of 400 tons and The Mary Redcliffe of 500 tons - were distinctively big, though several vessels of 400 tons can be seen trading at Bristol in these years. The Mary and John of 900 tons was a giant, standing apart from any other known privately owned vessel, though we find a safe-conduct for an unnamed ship of 800 tons trading from Bristol in 1461. This may in fact have been The Mary and John. This exceptional ship was almost certainly experimental (perhaps an exploration of the potential of the increasingly complex sail plans of the age). Whether she proved a good investment of the £2666 13s 4d Worcester tells us she cost to build is unknown. It is interesting that fifty years or so later English merchantmen in excess of 200 tons were exceptional. The days of experiment with mighty vessels passed quickly. With the combined tonnage of Canvinges other ships totalling over 2000 tons, we get a measure of his investment. Worcester also tells us that for eight years Canynges employed 800 men on these ships. This was a huge proportion of the adult male population of the town. Much capital

and many livelihoods, therefore, were involved in the fortunes of the *Canynges Line*.²²

Town government made many demands on Canynges's time. Fifteenth-century Bristol was ruled by forty-two 'wise and discrete' men whose task was the 'sadde, steedefast and politique rule' of the town; there was a mayor, a sheriff and forty members of Common Council, two of whom acted as bailiffs for the council. Canynges had been coopted before he was thirty. The composition of Common Council is known only intermittently and then only in part, for less than ten, often incomplete, lists survive from the year of Henry VI's accession to 1467 when Canynges withdrew from government. By then he had probably served continuously for nearly forty years as a councillor. Almost without exception, if the occupation of members is described, it was that of 'merchant'. Canynges cut his teeth in the exercise of direct power when he was chosen bailiff in 1432. The shrievalty followed in 1438 and on 15 September 1441 he was elected mayor of Bristol for the first time, assuming office on Michaelmas Day. He was still under forty. On that day, in the presence of the commonalty, he donned a scarlet furred cloak and in so doing was, as we have seen, carrying on a family tradition, following the elder William Canynges, also five times mayor, and his father John, who was twice mayor. In four later years Canynges repeated the mayoral oath, five times in all in the space of twenty-five years. It was remarkable that twelve times in less than a century three generations of one family should hold Bristol's highest office. If at first tradition had played a part in beginning the sequence, Canynges was not chosen repeatedly thereafter because of the past. There was dignity and kudos in this office, but there was also a price to be paid in very hard work, alleviated, it is true, by joyous moments in the ceremonial round. In choosing their president Common Council needed one who spoke with authority, a leader who had tact, decision and sensitivity to the interests of his peers and the needs of the wider community of the town. In September 1441 Common Council had clearly picked the right man.

On Michaelmas Day, after the sounding of the town bell, a new mayor would stand on the high dais in the Guildhall and take his oath of office, a splendid and solemn declaration which reveals his

^{22.} Ibid 13-4 & notes, *Overseas* 58f, Dallaway, *op. cit.*, 114-5; *Tynly* in the text seems an error for Tenby.

wide-ranging charge. The oath was long, comprehending the spiritual as well as the secular, but, reading it carefully, we can see that there were no superfluous words. The oath begins 'I shall be good and true to the king . . . and truly with all my power I shall save and keep the king's town of Bristol . . ., reproving and punishing all offenders . . .'. The mayor acknowledged concern for widows and orphans and the destruction of heresies and errors ('clepid openly lolladries'). Each day except Sundays and the eves of festivals the mayor with the sheriff was expected to be at the Counter, there to hear complaints and differences between men at variance.²³

The volume and significance of business handled by the mayor and Common Council varied between meetings. The session on 29 August 1455 is an example of a busy one. Richard Hatter was mayor and was attended by Philip Meed, the sheriff, and thirty-four other councillor, who all, with one exception, had held or were to hold the office of mayor (thirteen councillors), sheriff (eight) or bailiff (twelve). This particular meeting was an important one and its ordinances were entered in the *Great Red Book*; they related to the election of chamberlains, admittance of burgesses and portmen, the weighing of strangers' merchandise by the chamberlains, the sale of salt by strangers, maintenance and repair of common property (the town 'rent') as well as other matters. Canynges was among those present.²⁴

After the discussion of business of this kind Canynges and his like were grateful for a comfortable home to withdraw to at the end of a taxing day. Unlike William Canynges I and his father, the younger William, moving to a grander site, chose to live on the west side of Redcliffe Street, a narrow road which ran from near Bristol Bridge to the north to Redcliffe Gate at the south, Canynges's house stood a few minutes from the Guildhall and from Redcliffe church, among shops, warehouses and other residences. A visit to Redcliffe Street today is a dispiriting experience, but the links with the past are of current concern in that archaeologists are exploring what can be found of Canynges's house. The narrow frontage of

^{23.} Ricart, op. cit., 69-74, 84-5.

Great Red Book of Bristol (G.R.B. hereafter) ed. E.W.W. Veale, Bristol Rec.Soc., iv, viii, xvi, xviii (1933, 1937, 1950, 1953); Common Council lists are in i. 125–9, 135, 253–4, ii 48–53 (1455), 57, 152–5, iii 82–4, Little Red Book, i 86–8, 114–5, 137–140, 149, 153, ii 49–51.



Effigy of William Canynges in priest's robes, south transept of St. Mary Redcliffe church Photograph by A.J. Knee

what was once a local palace was savaged by road-widening in 1937. On this site Canynges stored his merchandise, there was a hall, a private chapel perhaps, and one room, possibly the parlour, was decorated with encaustic tiles thought to be of the midfifteenth century, which are now in the British Museum. At the west of the site, which ran sixty to seventy years back from the street to the Avon, Canynges built in stone a beautiful house of handsome architecture with a tower and four bay-windows.²⁵ From these windows there was a view of the steady flow of ships, mostly tiny, up from the South-West and across from Wales or Ireland, which moved to and from The Back. The churches of St Thomas and St Mary were about equidistant from Canynges's home and both had the same vicar, Nicholas Pittes, an Oxford graduate and a licensed preacher in the diocese. These were populous parishes but for centuries they were only chapelries of the church of St John at Bedminster, of which parish Pittes appears as rector in 1473.²⁶ From May 1454 Canynges had permission, granted by Thomas Beckington, bishop of Bath and Wells, to celebrate divine services in his home.27

It was members of Bristol's Common Council who, almost as a duty, attended the twenty-six parliaments which met at Westminster or elsewhere between November 1422 and November 1470. One important exception to this practice was Canynges's half-brother, Thomas Young, who first sat for Bristol in October 1435 and thereafter, except March 1453, on each occasion until July 1455. Young's striking continuity of membership of parliament as a Bristol representative was that of one who often returned to his home town and who was from at least October 1441 its Recorder. His personal background and family ties made him admirably qualified for his task. William Canynges represented Bristol three times in parliament, each time sitting with his half-brother. In

Dallaway, loc. cit., 145-6, R.H. Jones, Canynges House, Survey and Excavation 1983-4 (Bristol, 1984), E. Eames, 'The Canynges pavement', Jnl. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc., 3rd ser., xiv (1951), 33-46, W.A. Pantin, 'Medieval townhouse plans', Med. Archaeol., vii (1963), 232.

^{26.} A.B. Emden, Biographical Register of University of Oxford to A.D. 1500. 3 vols. (Oxford 1957–9), (hereafter B.R.U.O.), ii 1485.

^{27.} Register of Thomas Beckyngton 1443–65, ed. H.C. Maxwel-Lyte and M.C.B. Dawes, Somerset Rec. Soc. xlix, 1 (1934–5), i 231.

^{28.} Driver, loc. cit., 113-121.

November 1439 he heard discussion about the weakness of foreign trade; he was keeping his own head above water here, but naturally had strong and informed views. His second parliament lasted three sessions between November 1450 and May 1451 and ended in drama when Young, a servant of Richard, duke of York, in the 1440s and his attorney by March 1449, moved for the recognition of the duke as heir apparent to the still childless Henry VI. For his trouble he was sent to the Tower of London. In 1455 Canynges witnessed Young's famous assertion of the right to speak freely in parliament and his successful demand for the removal of a stain upon his character. England was by now a troubled land, verging on the edge of civil war.²⁹

The political sentiments of Common Council and of the townsmen of Bristol in these testing times awaits detailed appraisal, but in general it seems that neither Richard of York nor his son, the future Edward IV, had cause for complaint about Bristol, but rather a good deal for gratitude. The loyalties and influence of Thomas Young were probably a factor, but there were other determinants at work. During Canynges's third mayoralty of 1456–7 there were at least two interventions on the duke of York's behalf. Harry May, a troublesome burgess from Ireland, acting in collusion with the master of Henry VI's ordinance, John Judde, was prevented from selling gunpowder, brimstone and saltpetre to the political disadvantage of the duke of York. In the same term mayor and Common Council occupied Bristol castle on the duke of York's instructions 'against the purposed malice' of the duke of Somerset. Some time in or after 1463 Bristol petitioned the earl of Warwick claiming that in view of its costs on the king's behalf payment of the fifteenth granted in the last parliament would be unbearable. In addition to financing sixty men who had served at the king's pleasure at a cost of £160 (there was a Bristol contingent at the battle of Towton on 29 March 1461, fighting under the town banner of a ship), they had sent 'ships and navies' on three occasions, one of which may have been in July 1461 when the town was ordered to send vessels to the Welsh coast. In addition, Warwick was told pointedly, £200 had been lent to the king and had not yet been repaid. Some time before 9 August 1461 William

^{29.} J.S. Roskell, Commons and their Speakers in English Parliaments 1376–1523 (Manchester, 1965), 40–3, J.T. Rosenthal, Estates and Finances of Richard, duke of York (1411–1460) (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965), 179.

Canynges had lent Edward IV £333 6s 8d and a record of some days earlier shows that Thomas Young had lent £116 13s 4d.³⁰

Edward IV acceded to the throne on 4 March and was crowned at Westminster on 28 June 1461. Some nine weeks later, travelling from Salisbury via Devizes, he came to Bristol on 4 September and stayed several days. Canynges had helped to entertain Henry VI on his visits in 1447, 1448, and 1452,31 but September 1461 was different because Canynges was now mayor and Edward IV was a new king, paying his first visit. Edward, wrote Rikart with the proud voice of the town clerk, was 'ful honourably receivid in as worshipfull wise as ever he was in env towne or citee'. There was pageantry and spectacle at Temple Gate and Temple Cross with the delivery of the town keys to the king by a giant dressed as William the Conqueror. Saint George killed the Dragon against a background of angelic voices. The mayor gave the king £50 towards the cost of his household and, as one Victorian historian thought, may even have entertained him at his house. On a later visit in 1473 Edward IV stayed at St Augustine's Abbey.32

One memorable event which ended in a public spectacle noted by Ricart was the trial of Sir Baldwin Fulford, a West Country supporter of Henry VI. The king presided and Canynges and Thomas Young were members of the commission which sentenced Fulford to death. He was executed on 9 September. Canynges led discussion with the king about the renewal of the town's fee farm, which was regranted at the 1439 rate of £160 per annum, but on this occasion the grant was for the first time made in perpetuity.³³ This brings us to an occasion, apparently some years later, when Canynges had offended Edward IV and had to pay a fine of £2000 pro pace sua habenda.³⁴ This was a huge sum and Canynges had either committed some grave offence or done something which the king, unpredictably extortionate as he could be, chose to regard as a grave offence. William Worcester, our only authority, writes baldly and without explanation or date. In the absence of corro-

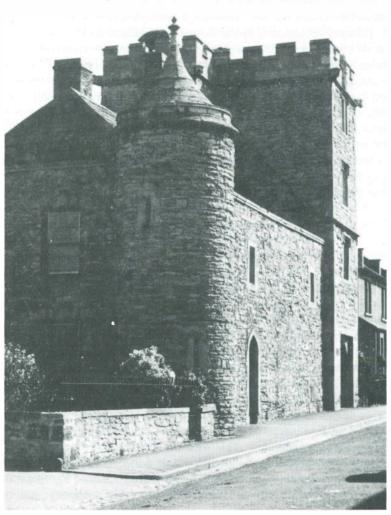
^{30.} G.R.B. i 136–8, ii 53–4, iii 77–8, Cal. Pat. Rolls 1461–7, 41, 44, W. Hunt, Bristol (London, 1895), 99.

^{31.} B. Wolffe, Henry VI (London, 1981), 366-7, 370.

^{32.} Warkworth's Chronicle ed. J.O. Halliwell (Camden Soc., 1839), Ricart, op. cit., 42, 45, C.L.Scofield, Edward the Fourth 2 vols (London, 1923), i 199.

Bristol Charters 1378–1499 ed. H.A. Cronne, Bristol Rec. Soc., xi (1945), 143f.

^{34.} Dallaway, op. cit., 115



Remains of the College of the Holy Trinity, Westbury on Trym Photograph by Reece Winstone

boration by another source and because this notice is inconsistent with what is otherwise known of Canynges's relations with Edward IV it has been tempting to try to explain Worcester's statement away. Hunt, for example, suggested that Canynges was merely transferring to the king money collected on his behalf, but this is unconvincing, 35 as is the opinion that the fine was paid in return for the renewal of the town's privileges in 1461. Any suggestion that this was a punishment for earlier 'Lancastrianism' is contrary to the record. Worcester, we must conclude, is too good a source to be ignored or sanitised. Certainly there were some in Bristol who knew or believed that Edward IV and Canynges were not as one, for when later Canynges entered the priesthood 'it was said' in the town that he did so in all haste to escape remarriage at the king's command. Canynges indeed acted quickly in September 1467, but what was then said in Bristol stemmed from misunderstanding and gossip.36

September 1467 in fact saw a parting of the ways in Canynges's life. Now aged sixty-five, his wife Joan, to whom he had been married for perhaps forty years, died. The exact date of her death has not been established, but we know that she was alive on 8 September and that she had died by 13 October following.³⁷ It is virtually certain that Joan died shortly before 19 September, for on that momentous day Canynges rode out to Westbury on Trym to see his old friend John Carpenter, bishop of Worcester, who there and then admitted him acolyte in the chapel at Westbury college. The date of this admission fell on an Ember Saturday, a day of ordination. Canynges, it is obvious, was keen to start on his road to the priesthood. His title, as recorded in Carpenter's register, was the rectorship of St Alban's church, Worcester, which the bishop had granted Canynges earlier and in preparation for the time when Joan's anticipated death occurred.38 To some in Bristol, however, it seemed odd that their mayor whose term of office still had some days to run should act as quickly as he did. In the accompanying speculation, Canynges's expensive offence against Edward IV was recalled. Here, it was believed, lay the explanation

^{35.} Hunt, op. cit., 100

^{36.} Ricart, op. cit., 44

^{37.} Williams, op. cit., 260, 265

^{38.} John Carpenter's Register, f 569, Heref. & Worcs. Rec. Off. I have a particular debt to Dr R.W. Dunning for skilful guidance here.

of his conduct: he was running away from a king who planned to bully him, just widowed as he was, into a union of royal choosing. It seems a grossly improbable idea, but Ricart, writing some twelve years later, thought the tittle-tattle merited report. 'This year (1467)', he wrote, 'William Canynges, mayor, should have been married by the king our sovereign lord's commandment *as it was said*. Wherefore the said Canynges gave up the world and in all haste took orders upon him of the good Bishop of Worcester called Carpenter.'³⁹

On 16 April 1468, less than seven months after his admission as acolyte and the end of his final mayoral term, Canynges was ordained priest by Carpenter at the bishop's manor house at Northwick, near Worcester. Twice earlier, and in the space of three weeks, Canynges had made this journey, advancing from subdeacon (12 March 1468) to deacon (2 April). On the day Canynges was ordained priest, Carpenter collated him to the prebend of Goodringhill in Westbury college. 40 Robert Slimbridge, who had himself only held this prebend since 7 November 1467, made way for Canynges. Slimbridge was an impressive man, for later he received a doctorate in Canon Law at the University of Bologna and later still was to succeed Canynges as Dean of Westbury in 1474.41 We cannot be certain that Canynges now abandoned his great house in Redcliffe Street, but in all probability he did. Certainly he was quick to make his mark at Westbury, revealing again those qualities of leadership and application he had shown on Common Council. Carpenter soon decided that Canynges would make an admirable dean and, by the bishop's arrangement, Henry Sampson, who had been dean for fifteen years, withdrew to make way for Canynges, who was inducted by Philip Hyett, the subdean since 1458, to the office of Dean of Westbury college on 3 June 1469. There were some notable men present that day: among them were Thomas Hawkins, archdeacon of Worcester (Provost of Oriel College, Oxford in 1475), William Mogys, archdeacon of Stafford, and Robert Enkbarrow, diocesan

^{39.} Ricart, op. cit., 44.

^{40.} Reg. Carpenter, f 569v. For the title of the prebend see a reference about 1140 to the 'whole plot of arable land called *Goderinghella*' in A. Hamilton Thompson, 'Notes on the Ecclesiastical History on the parish of Henbury', TBGAS xxxviii (1915) 103.

^{41.} B.R.U.O ii 1732-3, Reg. Carpenter ii 569, 571v.

registrar of Worcester. Two other distinguished friends and servants of Carpenter, prebendaries of Westbury, may also have been present at the induction, Thomas Edgecombe, prebend of Henbury, and William Vauce, prebend of Holley. In this new world Canynges kept company with men of such calibre and for five years the welfare of the college became his prime concern. Thoughts about shipping, business abroad and preparations for the next meeting at the Guildhall had vanished from his mind and had been replaced by quite different preoccupations. Canynges had turned away from worldly things.⁴²

By 1467 William Canynges and John Carpenter had known each other well for a long time, and a mutual respect and affection had grown between them. Carpenter had a natural affinity with merchants and, conscientious diocesan that he was, had often visited Bristol, by far the densest centre of population in his diocese. There the local clergy needed particular support for the town had long been a haunt of Lollards. It was partly to counter this threat of heresy, by raising the level of education of the town's clergy and by regular preaching to townsmen, that Carpenter had effected his well-known ordinances for the Guild of Calendars, establishing a new library at his own expense and providing for weekly sermons by a gradute prior.⁴³ Education was close to Carpenter's heart, as his whole career and his work at Westbury shows.

Once a clerk and chaplain of Henry VI, and possibly the king's choice as bishop (he had been consecrated at Eton in March 1444), Carpenter had a life-long attachment to Oxford University, where he was Provost of Oriel from 1428 to 1444, chancellor in 1438 and later a generous benefactor. Oxford graduates, often Oriel men, were prominent in Worcester diocesan administration and play a part in the history of Westbury college. Carpenter visited the village almost every year from 1453 and clearly loved the place. There stood the College of the Holy Trinity, a college of secular clerks, and nearby the parish church. The college had been founded over two hundred years earlier and Godfrey Giffard, bishop of Worcester 1268–1302, had tried to raise it to equal standing with the mother church at Worcester with its monastic

^{42.} *Ibid* ii 240v-241, *B.R.U.O.* i 630, 891-2, ii 1287-8, 1943-4.

^{43.} N.I. Orme, 'The Guild of Kalendars, Bristol', TBGAS xcvi (1979), 40-5.

chapter.⁴⁴ Carpenter's aims, however, were different, though the care and attention he gave to Westbury and his burial in the parish church there has sometimes caused misunderstanding. Fifty years after Carpenter's death, John Leland reported that he would have liked to have been *styled* bishop of Worcester and Westbury.⁴⁵ Such a thought may have passed through Carpenter's mind and perhaps he talked about it as an attractive idea. Any thought of this kind was, however, quite distinct from a plan to give Westbury joint cathedral status with Worcester, and it is this with which Carpenter has sometimes been mistakenly identified. In practice he never did anything to give practical effect even to altering a title which had stood for over eight hundred years.

By 1467 Carpenter had breathed new life into Westbury college. There were now almshouses for men and women, a school with a master of grammar⁴⁶ and a chantry chapel had been established in the parish church. As at his palace at Hartlebury in Worcestershire, Carpenter had rebuilt strikingly, making Westbury, Leland thought, 'more like a castle than a college with a fair gate and divers towers and with a strong embattled wall'. The new almshouses had been built near the church and opposite the college gatehouse. In 1463 St Andrew's church at Clifton had been appropriated to fund the grammar master. Edward IV had endowed obits in the 'new chapel' in the church.⁴⁷ The college's finances and administration had been altered in 1455 when with papal sanction the cure of souls was transferred from the dean to the subdean who was paid £10 per annum. Residence by the dean was no longer required; in future he received a modest 40s a year and a subsistence allowance of 6s 8d weekly when he was in residence. 48 The appointment of Henry Sampson as dean indicates

^{44.} R.M. Haines, 'Aspects of the episcopate of John Carpenter', Journ Ec. Hist., xix (1968), 11–40, B.R.U.O i 360–1, H.J. Wilkins, Westbury College 1194–1544 (Bristol, 1917) remains worthwhile for cautious use. I am grateful for use of M.J. Morgan's unpublished M.A. thesis (Birmingham, 1960), on Carpenter. A. Hamilton Thompson judged Westbury College 'moribund' in 1455, The English Clergy (Oxford, 1947), 160.

^{45.} J. Leland, *Itinerary in England and Wales* ed. L. Toulmin Smith 5 vols (London, 1910), v 228, *TBGAS*, xxxviii 109–112, 140–150.

N.I. Orme, Education in the West of England 1066–1548 (Exeter, 1976), 182–4.

^{47.} Cal. Pat. Rolls 1461-67, 322, 444, Reg. Carpenter ii 25-6, 44, 57v.

^{48.} Cal. Pap. Letters 1455-64, 299-32.

the qualities Carpenter looked for in the head of his reformed college. Sampson, who was a close friend of the bishop, was a good administrator and was Provost of Oriel College from 1449 to 1476.⁴⁹ At Westbury in addition to the subdean, might be found a resident treasurer, the master of grammar, stipendiary priests, twelve choirboys and twelve members of the almshouses. Here, therefore, was a small community, physically well provided for in new accommodation but, as was to emerge, somewhat underfunded for its work. There from time to time the bishop was welcomed in procession and by the sounding of bells.

In the seventeenth century a tradition survived in Bristol that Canynges had made a vital contribution to the fulfilment of Carpenter's work at Westbury. An inscription, which may have been penned in the reign of Elizabeth I but is first recorded in 1669, says that Canynges 'did build within the town of Westbury a college with the canons'. 50 This long-standing belief carries weight. There are two things which are clear: a lot of money was spent at Westbury after about 1455 and there is every likelihood that Bristol burgesses, among whom Canynges is sure to have been prominent, had made a contribution to the new work. This would in part help to explain why it was that after Canynges death his effigy in priest's robes was erected in Westbury parish church. This was later transferred to Redcliffe, probably when the college was dissolved in 1544. It may now be seen in the south transept there near the splendid tomb of Canynges in mayoral robes and of his well-dressed wife.

Some weeks after his ordination as priest in April 1468, Canynges sang his first mass in Redcliffe church on Whitsunday, 17 May. It is this happy occasion which is recalled in the same church each year today. Recently St Mary's had been much in Canynges's mind. On 10 May 1466 he had been licenced to endow obits in a chantry of St Catherine in the church through the alienation in mortmain of lands to the annual value of £10. Another licence followed on 13 October 1467 establishing a chantry of St George with a similar endowment. By the latter date Joan Canynges was, as we have seen, dead and prayers were

^{49.} B.R.U.O. ii 1635-6.

^{50.} Williams, op cit., 78-80, Haines, loc. cit., 36.

^{51.} Ricart, op. cit., 44.

^{52.} Cal. Pat. Rolls 1461-7, 519, G.R.B. iv 51-2.

to be sung for her departed soul. Canynges endowed his chantries, as he said, at a time when he was growing old, and, after a life devoted to business, was concerned for the fate of his soul after death. At this time Redcliffe church was in difficulties which had long worried the parish community. In two crucial areas, the decline of organised worship and the deterioration of the fabric of the church and its properties, Canynges took decisive action which accompanied the first steps of his withdrawal from secular affairs. On 20 October 1467, remembering the wishes of earlier benefactors, including his own forbears (of whom was Canynges thinking?), he gave £340 to the vicar and churchwardens of St Mary's so that the divine offices might in future be regularly observed. There had been a collapse in revenues from church properties which had originally been given to fund services. With the properties repaired, they would in future be able to finance two chaplains (known of old as St Mary's priests) and three clerks one of whom was called William Canynges's priest. Near the church there were chambers, probably built by Canynges, for those whom Worcester called Canynges's priests. It was also about this time that Canynges made over his rights in jewels worth £160 which Sir Theobald Gorges, a Yorkist supporter from nearby Wraxall in Somerset, had pledged to Canynges in return for a loan of that sum. Here Canynges's wish was that the jewels, goods, chattels and ornaments of the church should be restored and kept in good repair.53

But more serious for Redcliffe church was the fact that in 1445 its steeple had been stuck by lightning with disastrous consequences. A hundred feet of the recently-built spire had been felled, the base of the tower may have been unsettled and there had been substantial damage to the vaulting of the nave. We do not know when repairs began, but for more than twenty years little more than patching against the elements took place. Eventual restoration, together with some additions, was made possible in large part, if not wholly, through Canynges's generosity. The cost in labour and materials was substantial for, as William Worcester reported, one hundred labourers, carpenters, masons and others were employed by Canynges; they continued their work after his death. In 1480, for example, freestone masons, had had quarters

^{53.} G.R.B. iv 42-9.

^{54.} Adam's Chronicle of Bristol (Bristol, 1910), 66, Dallaway, op. cit., 133.

on Redcliffe Hill, were working on the foundations of the tower. By then it had been decided that the spire should be left 'broken' above the point of the 1445 fracture. Thus it survived until 1872. When Worcester asked (?Thomas) Norton, the master mason in charge, about the height of the tower and spire, he was told they stood at 200 feet. On 7 September 1480 Worcester questioned another artisan working on the church vaulting about its height, and noted that the belfry had been rebuilt. He gives the weight of the six bells of the church which rang across the town. 55 Altogether the scale of the rebuilding and embellishment of Redcliffe church at this time was so memorable that in May 1483 in a town record Canynges was described as 'renovator and as it were in other respects founder and among others a very special benefactor of the church of Redcliffe'. The reference to 'others' should be noted; in later tradition, linked with Canynges, they were said to have paid 'masons and workmen to repair, edify, cover and glaze the church at Redcliffe'.56

Canvinges's enthusiasm for his parish church almost certainly prompted an undated petition (attributable to the year following 27 August 1468) to Robert Stillington, bishop of Bath and Wells and chancellor of England. Its author was Thomas Middleton esquire of Stanton Drew in Somerset and father-in-law of Canynges's only surviving child, his son John, who had married Elizabeth Middleton in 1464. Middleton, complaining for himself and on his daughter's behalf, alleged that Canynges had dissipated assets which were already bespoken and intended to dispose of more, thereby breaking an informal marriage settlement between Canynges and himself of 27 August 1464, unless the chancellor intervened. Middleton said his information was 'plainly noised in the town of Bristol'. The 'noise' which bothered Middleton was heard in the town within a year or so of the story about Edward IV's plans for Canynges's second marriage, and may have been equally inaccurate. What Middleton had heard ran to this effect: Canynges had run down his capital assets in lands and properties in Bristol and Somerset so that they were now worth only two-thirds of their 1464 value of £100 per annum, and, what was worse, he intended to dispose of more. Thus he would disinherit his son John

^{55.} Ibid 65, 114, 133, 157-8.

^{56.} Bristol Arch. Off., Great Red Book f. 247; this crucial phrase is omitted in the calendar in G.R.B. iii 150►2; Williams, op. cit., 81 n.1.

and his heirs to whom they had been promised after the deaths of William Canynges and his wife. In addition it was believed that Canynges intended to part with a great portion of his money, plate and moveables with the result that after his father's death John would receive only one tenth in value of the £2000-worth of goods promised him. On top of this, whereas Middleton had met his part of the bargain in the marriage settlement, Canynges had not provided Elizabeth with the clothing and other things necessary to her degree which he had promised. In 1464 Canynges had obviously made handsome assurances to his heir apparent and his brideto-be, telling Middleton that John would be left after William's death as well at ease as the son of any merchant of the past one hundred years except for the heir of Robert Cheddar, who was twice mayor of Bristol in the 1360s and a rich cloth exporter, whose reputation for wealth had become legendary. The chancellor was asked to call Canynges to account, remonstrate with him and instruct him to honour his undertakings 'in good faith and conscience'. It is surprising to find that Canynges was thought to need reminding of qualities which appear to have been fundamental to his character or of his duties to his sole heir. Canynges's devotion to Redcliffe church and his future plans for it needs not in fact have involved the breach of faith which Middleton feared. Moreover, Middleton's belief that if the chancellor exercised his powers all might still be well shows that even in the most pessimistic view all was not yet lost. This is not to deny that Elizabeth may have had some grievance against her father-inlaw with respect to her wardrobe. In the event, and this was the saddest part of the matter, John Canynges died before his father and left Elizabeth childless.57

There is a suggestion that early in 1473, after four years as dean of Westbury, Canynges may have felt himself inadequate for the responsibilities of his office, for on 24 March Robert Slimbridge (here described as king's clerk) was licenced by the king to sue at Rome for provision to the office of dean of Westbury. In the event Slimbridge only succeeded after Canynges's death. On 12 November 1474 this was imminent, for Canynges drew up his will that day. It was witnessed by Philip Hyett, the subdean, John Green, a Bristol surgeon, William Spencer, an executor, and

^{57.} Overseas 140-3.

^{58.} Cal. Pat. Rolls 1467-77, 393

Thomas Hexton, bailiff of Bristol. The copy of this testament in the *Great Orphan Book* is both fascinating and instructive. We are grateful for reflections of Canynges's personal values and for references to his associations with important fraternities and bodies in the town of his earlier years. What is missing from the will is evident sign of the wealth he had commanded before he became a priest.

Canynges wished to be buried with his wife in the tomb he had constructed in St Mary Redcliffe at the south end of the middle aisle of the nave. 60 Today this impressive tomb stands in the south transept of the church adjacent to the effigy of Canynges in priest's robes from Westbury parish church. Spaced almost within the eye-span of the viewer, these images and recollections witness to William Canynges's two lives.

There was a funeral at Westbury college and then the cortege, accompanised by members of the Westbury community, all of them beneficiaries of Canynges's will, processed to St Mary Redcliffe where Nicholas Pittes, the vicar, took the burial service. He together with each chaplain and clerk of the church, the keeper of the offertory box in the historic north door and the churchwardens received a legacy. By his tomb Canynges had instructed that twenty-four new torches, each weighing twenty-one pounds of wax, should be lit. After the month's mind these were to be distributed to the town's churches and to others nearby.

Canynges died on 19 November 1474. He was aged 72 and was widowed and childless. One son, William Canynges III, had married Isabel Vowell of Wells by May 1454. In April 1458 they had received from the elder William lands in Bristol, Wells, the hundred of Wells and Westbury on Trym. This William made his will in London on 8 June of that year and died some months later. He had bequeathed the reversion of his lands after the death of his wife without children by him to his brother John with remainder to his father if John died without issue. The date of John's death is unknown but it occurred some time between the summer of 1468 and 19 November 1474. It signalled the impending end of the Bristol line of the family.

Canynges's two family beneficiaries by his will were Elizabeth,

^{59.} B.A.O., Great Orphan Book f 12, Ricert, op. cit., 45

^{60.} Ibid. 44

^{61.} Som. Rec. Soc., 1 231, Williams, op. cit., 57-8.

his daughter-in-law, and William Canynges IV, the son of his brother Thomas. At the time of his death Elizabeth already had life possession of eight holdings in Bristol (A) and by the will received six further holdings in the town (B) for life with reversion of B to another Elizabeth (or Isabel), the sister of William Canynges IV.⁶² By the will William Canynges IV received three tenements, an orchard, a close and a small garden in Bristol and the reversion of the life holding of Elizabeth Middleton in A. His wife was another Elizabeth and their son was Thomas.

Canynges had possessed other holdings in addition to the twenty mentioned in his will and those alienated to endow his chantries, but the descent of these properties requires further investigation. We may, however, notice that Elizabeth, the widow of William Canynges IV, and her second husband, John Depden, granted in September 1483 properties and rents for life to John Twynhow, the Recorder of Bristol, and two others, and that later Twynhow granted at least some of these to Elizabeth's son by William Canynges IV, Thomas. Among these were Canynges's house (his 'place') in Redcliffe Street.

Canynges's executors were William Spencer and Richard Hicks, one of his servants. Spencer, another rich merchant, had freighted cloth to Spain on the same ship as Canynges in 1461 and had served with him on Common Council; he was mayor in 1465, 1473 and 1478. He too was a benefactor of the church, rebuilding the choir and body of the church of the Grey Friars and restoring their properties so that chantries which had lapsed through their decay might be revived. He had a sharp civic consciousness and on 5 October 1492 endowed an annual loan of £87 6s 8d to help fund the mayor and bailiffs meet the charges of their offices. 63

To his executors Canynges had entrusted for the welfare of his soul the residue of his goods, jewels and debts which had not been bespoken in his will. The values involved may have been significant. Some of this money was spent on a water fountain built in freestone in St Peter's Street and on an almshouse founded in Lewin's Mead opposite the house of the Franciscans.⁶⁴

One derivative of an act which Spencer made on his own account survives today. On 29 November 1493, desiring the

^{62.} G.O.B., iii 150-2.

^{63.} Overseas, 209-210, G.R.B., iv 68-9, 101-3.

^{64.} Dallaway, op. cit., 123, 149, G.R.B. iv 103-4.

increase of divine worship, he gave in trust a house on The Back worth £4 per annum, the revenue from which was partly to fund sermons on three days of Whitsuntide. Each preacher was to receive 6s 8d and the mayor 3s 4d for refreshing them at his table. 65 At some later date the three sermons were converted to one on Whitsunday. The Rush Sunday service (the floor of Redcliffe church is strewn with rushes according to the Sarum Use and the civic dignitaries receive posies of flowers and herbs intended symbolically to protect them against infections) is an important and colourful event. The modern service sheet claims that Spencer endowed his sermons to commemorate Canynges's first celebration of the mass on Whitsunday 1468 in Redcliffe church, but this, alas, is not so, for there is no reference to Canynges in Spencer's endowment. How therefore and when did this mistaken association begin? No exact answer can at present be given, but we know to within a few years.

In the 1840s when Redcliffe church was in a severely depressed condition, the memory of Canynges's generosity to the church survived, and in 1848 when a group of enthusiasts banded together to raise funds for the restoration of St Mary's, they called themselves the Canynges Society. When the restoration was finished in 1872, and for the first time for more than four centuries there was a great spire on Redcliffe Hill to summon the faithful to worship, there was appropriate gratitude to the Canynges Society for the help it had given. But the celebration of William Canynges's first mass in Redcliffe church on Whitsunday is another matter. The earliest reference to this yet found is in an entry in the parish magazine of 1895. It looks as if it was in or shortly before this year that the admirable usage of recalling the memory of Canynges each year began.

If some time-machine could transport us back across five hundred years to talk to William Canynges, there would be many matters to discuss and questions to ask of him. We would talk of his forty years as merchant, of the fluctuating fortunes of Bristol and of her merchandise and ships. Which years did he remember best from the time when he had built a fortune greater than that of

^{65.} Ibid, iv 104-6.

Miss Elizabeth Ralph, archivist, of Redcliffe church, helped with the parish magazines and other matters. I acknowledge gratefully her generous scholarship.

the elder William Canynges who had died six years before he was born and that of his impressive father who had died when he was only two? Presumably he owed much to his mother, to his stepfather and to his father-in-law. What were his memories of them? How sad that neither of his sons had survived to continue the family tradition. Had his ships proved a good investment and had The Mary and John justified what he had paid for her? What, incidentally, had become of the ships? In retrospect it seemed to us that Common Council had been plutocratically élite and narrowly recruited. Had this caused friction in the town? As for his relations with Edward IV, we are puzzled. What had gone wrong? And what of the fuss Thomas Middleton had made? We would ask him to talk of his friendship with John Carpenter and of his association with Westbury college before and after he was ordained priest. What had he contributed to the cost of the rebuilding of the college? When had he first experienced his calling to the priesthood, and were we correct in believing that his wife's death had been expected? Was he pleased with the progress of the rebuilding at Redcliffe church? Would he care to venture a figure indicating its cost to him personally?

Such is one reverie. For another the conversation might take a different course. But all would surely be impressed in meeting this great man of whom contemporaries thought so well, one who had strikingly in old age changed the pattern of his life. Respected and admired by his peers, remembered gratefully for his generosity, here was an eminent burgess who had become priest-extraordinary.





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